Project Start Up

Resource Commitment

Overview

Once the project has been given the official go ahead, it is imperative to establish the project team and the project environment. In this stage of the project, key individuals are assigned project roles. Initially, the number of people brought to the team will be small. Groups represented on the team will probably be limited to key participants who are tasked with getting the project underway. These initial leaders will work to ensure that staff, equipment, and facility resources are in place. The remaining team members are assembled and the full-scale development effort is initiated.

If the project is formed as a matrix organization, it will be necessary to spend considerable time establishing commitments with other managers to ensure that needed resources will be committed to project activities.

Development of Work Packages

Upon approval of the project plan, the project manager and key task leaders begin development of the detailed work packages for each team. These work packages describe the specific responsibilities of each team and outline the portions of the plan that the team has responsibility for implementing.

The work package defines specific work breakdown tasks to be completed by the team, identifies the team's budget, and indicates when milestones and deliverables are due. A work package has the following characteristics:

- Represents units of work at the level where the work is performed.
- Clearly distinguishes one work package from all others.
- Contains clearly defined start and end dates that represent tangible accomplishments.
- Specifies a budget in terms of dollars, hours, or other measurable unit.
- Limits the work to be performed to a short period to facilitate tracking.

These work packages are critical if the project is a matrix organization.

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Assignment of Personnel

During this phase, the project manager is concerned with properly staffing the effort with personnel that meet the skills requirements defined by the project plan. There will be final negotiations over what personnel can be assigned and when they will be available. There may well be hiring and new employee introductions, and there may be a search for qualified experts who can assist in special problem areas. Evaluations will need to be made of assigned staff to determine if there are training needs or if there are potential risks based on the assigned staff. This is an extremely busy time for the project manager, and time must be made for effective communication.

This staffing period requires the attention of the project manager to ensure that new personnel are adequately briefed on the project and fully understand their roles and responsibilities. This effort is facilitated by a strong project plan, but still requires careful management by the project manager and team leads.

Team Review of Requirements

It is beneficial to have every team member review the system requirements documents and the project plan in order to understand the full scope of work to be performed. This process can be accomplished by:

- Providing documentation for the team to review
- Holding a kick off meeting where the system overview is briefed and the project plan is reviewed
- Scheduling kick-off meetings for large projects

The meeting works well for the initial members of the team, but those personnel who are added to the project later will miss important information. For sizable projects that require large numbers of new personnel, orientation briefings can occur frequently to review the overall scope of the effort.

Key objectives of the requirements review are to:

- Review the system specification.
- Review project milestones.
- Review procedures and standards that apply to the effort.
- Develop an understanding of the whole system prior to development.
- Call attention to specific portions of the project.
- Develop buy in and ownership of the project's end product.

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Allocation of Facility Assets

Next to staffing, adequate and timely availability of facilities and tools are needed to manage the project to plan. At project startup, the project manager must ensure that the facilities required for the project team are available. These facilities include physical floor space, office equipment, development environment, infrastructure to support the development effort, and basic supplies and equipment that personnel on the team will need to perform their assignments.

It is of paramount importance that the project manager establish an organized environment and facilitate getting the proper office space and development equipment in place in an orderly manner. Poor execution of the project start-up phase results in poor team morale that can be difficult to overcome in later phases of the project.

Allocation of Tools and Communication Systems

It is not enough to recognize in your plan that you need tools -- you must have the tools available at the right time. A project will need tools to assist in producing the project deliverable, and methods by which to communicate (phone, e-mail, fax) both internally and externally to the project. At project start-up, the project manager ensures that tools identified for the project are in place and that trained resources are available to help the team utilize the tools.

Poor management of tools and equipment can lead to situations where project team members are left idle while waiting for delivery of products. This puts the project at risk in the initial days, and presents morale issues that can be difficult to address.

Tools for information technology include hardware, software that supports project development efforts, and tools for performing management functions such as tracking and configuration management. Many of these tools have a lead time involved in both procurement and establishment. The project team needs to ensure that the necessary tools are in place well before they are needed. This allows adequate time to schedule necessary training and allows the various team members to become proficient prior to actually having to use the tool to meet a deadline.